

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TANANARIVE 1079

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MPOL, US, MA

SUBJECT: POSSIBLE U.S. NAVY USE OF MALAGASY NAVAL FACILITIES AT
DIEGO SUAREZ

SUMMARY: DIRECTOR GENERAL OF MALAGASY NAVAL REPAIR FACILITY
AT DIEGO SUAREZ INVITED USN USE OF FACILITY THROUGH DEFENSE
ATTACHE JUNE 12. GOVERNMENT CHANGED JUNE 15. EMBASSY BELIEVES
THAT EVEN NEW GOMR WITH ITS REVOLUTIONARY TRAPPINGS MAY
EVENTUALLY PERMIT U.S. USE OF FACILITY, BUT THAT FOR PRESENT
U.S. SHOULD GO SLOW AND WAIT SEVERAL MONTHS BEFORE MAKING ANY
FURTHER INQUIRY. MALAGASY SUSPICIONS AND SENSITIVITY CURRENTLY
ARE INTENSE. END SUMMARY.

1. DURING VISIT TO DIEGO SUAREZ JUNE 12 DEFENSE ATTACHE WAS
SOUGHT OUT BY LUCIEN ZASY, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF "SECREN",
MALAGASY NAVAL REPAIR FACILITY AT DIEGO SUAREZ, WHO SAID
AMERICAN NAVAL VESSELS ARE WELCOME TO USE SECREN FACILITIES.
WHEN DEFENSE ATTACHE REFERRED TO GOMR BAN ON ALL NAVAL SHIP
VISITS, ZASY SAID BAN WOULD NOT BE APPLIED TO SHIPS USING
SECREN FACILITIES AND THAT MILITARY DIRECTORY HAD
AUTHORIZED MAKING FACILITY AVAILABLE TO FOREIGN WARSHIPS.
TO PROVE POINT, ZASY SHOWED DEFENSE ATTACHE SECREN WORK
SCHEDULE WHICH INCLUDED FRENCH NAVAL VESSEL FOR JULY. ZASY
SAID FURTHER THAT AS LONG AS SHIP WAS USING SECREN REPAIR
FACILITIES, FUEL AND SUPPLIES WOULD BE AVAILABLE AND CREW
COULD HAVE SHORE LEAVE. ZASY ALSO GAVE DEFENSE ATTACHE
SLICK 92-PAGE BOOKLET PUBLISHED BY DCAN (FORMER FRENCH
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ORGANIZATION) THAT FULLY DESCRIBES FACILITIES IN FRENCH AND

ENGLISH. ANOTHER COPY OF BOOKLET ALREADY FORWARDED TO DIA (12/74) BY DEFENSE ATTACHE.

2. EMBASSY BELIEVES IT QUITE POSSIBLE THAT ECONOMIC IMPERATIVES OF SECREN OPERATION COULD OVERCOME GOMR POLITICAL BAN ON SHIP VISITS, AT LEAST FOR DIEGO SUAREZ, UNDER CONDITIONS ZASY DESCRIBES. EMBASSY HAS MADE ECONOMIC ARGUMENT FOR PORT USE WITH MALAGASY OFFICIALS IN PAST AND PARIS HERALD TRIBUNE CARRIED ARTICLE ON DIEGO SUAREZ BY DAVID OTTAWAY (JUNE 2-WASHINGTON POST) WHICH WAS UNDOUBTEDLY READ HERE BY SENIOR GOMR OFFICIALS. MANY KEY MILITARY OFFICERS REMAIN IN NEW RATSIRAKA GOVERNMENT.

3. EMBASSY BELIEVES U.S. NAVY MIGHT WELL FIND U.S. FACILITIES AT DIEGO SUAREZ USEFUL ALTHOUGH NOT ESSENTIAL. NOW, HOWEVER, IS NOT TIME TO TEST SECREN INVITATION OR TO PURSUE WITH HIGHER MALAGASY AUTHORITY. FOR NEXT FEW WEEKS EMBASSY EXPECTS MALAGASY REVOLUTIONARY FERVOR WILL BE AT ITS HEIGHT, AND FOR FORESEEABLE FUTURE, MALAGASY WILL BE SUSPICIOUS AND NERVOUS ABOUT "GREAT POWER" MOVES IN AREA. FIRST PROBLEM SHOULD COOL DOWN AND SECOND IS PERMANENT, BUT BOTH MAY PROVE MANAGEABLE IN TERMS OF U.S. INTERESTS.

4. REVOLUTIONARY ATMOSPHERICS HAVE BEEN CREATED PURPOSELY BY PRESIDENT OF SUPREME REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL, DIDIER RATSIRAKA, WHO BECAME NEW CHIEF OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT ONLY ON JUNE 15. EVEN IF HE WERE TO APPROVE USN USE OF SECREN FACILITIES, HOWEVER, IT IS NOT CERTAIN THAT HE COULD HANDLE POSSIBLE NEGATIVE REACTIONS OF STUDENT RADICALS AND OTHERS DURING PRESENT HEADY ATMOSPHERE. RADICALS WOULD BE LIKELY TO CHARGE U.S. INTERFERENCE IN INTERNAL AFFAIRS IF U.S. WARSHIP SHOWED UP IN NEAR FUTURE. IF RATSIRAKA WERE FORCED TO REVERSE DECISION, IT WOULD BE LONG TIME BEFORE ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY PRESENTED ITSELF.

5. FOR LONGER TERM, AS INDICATED ABOVE, ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS COULD LEAD TO OPENING OF SECREN FACILITIES TO ALL NAVAL VESSELS BY NEW GOMR. EMBASSY BELIEVES THIS WOULD INCLUDE SOVIET NAVY, BUT THINKS THAT STRATEGIC VALUE TO SOVIETS ABOUT SAME AS FOR USN: NICE BUT NOT NECESSARY. CONFIDENTIAL

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POLITICALLY, IT WOULD PROBABLY BE USEFUL TO HAVE SOVIES COME IN FIRST, AND ACCEPT RISK THAT SOVIETS MIGHT SEEK USN EXCLUSION AS CONDITION FOR SOVIET USE. PROBLEM WITH U.S. EAGERNESS ON USE OF DIEGO SUAREZ IS THAT IT WOULD SERVE TO CONFIRM MALAGASY CONVICTION THAT MADAGASCAR IS THE STRATEGIC HUB OF INDIAN OCEAN AND IS THEREFORE OBJECT OF SUBTLE U.S. MACHINATIONS. SUCH SUSPICIONS, FOR EXAMPLE, ACCORDING TO SENIOR GOMR OFFICIAL, WERE PARTIALLY RESPONSIBLE

FOR MALAGASY REJECTION OF U.S. PL 480 TITLE ONE RICE OFFER;
ANY U.S. MOVES THAT FEED SUCH SUSPICIONS COULD IMPAIR U.S.
INTERESTS MORE IMPORTANT THAN USE OF DIEGO SUAREZ.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (1) THAT NO U.S. INITIATIVE BE UNDERTAKEN CONCERNING U.S.
NAVY USE OF SECREN FACILITIES AT DIEGO SUAREZ FOR NEXT SEVERAL
MONTHS OR UNTIL EMBASSY CONCLUDES IT PRUDENT TO DO SO.
- (2) THAT U.S. RESPONSE TO ANY FURTHER MALAGASY INITIATIVE
EITHER IN WASHINGTON OR TANANARIVE BE RESTRAINED, BUT NOT
NEGATIVE IN TONE.

7. ACTION REQUESTED:

DEPARTMENT'S COMMENTS, AFTER CONSULTATION WITH NAVY, REQUESTED.
EXDIS CAPTION USED IN BELIEF THAT OPNAV - AT LEAST OP-06 -
STILL RECIEVES EXDIS MESSAGES.
ELFERS

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